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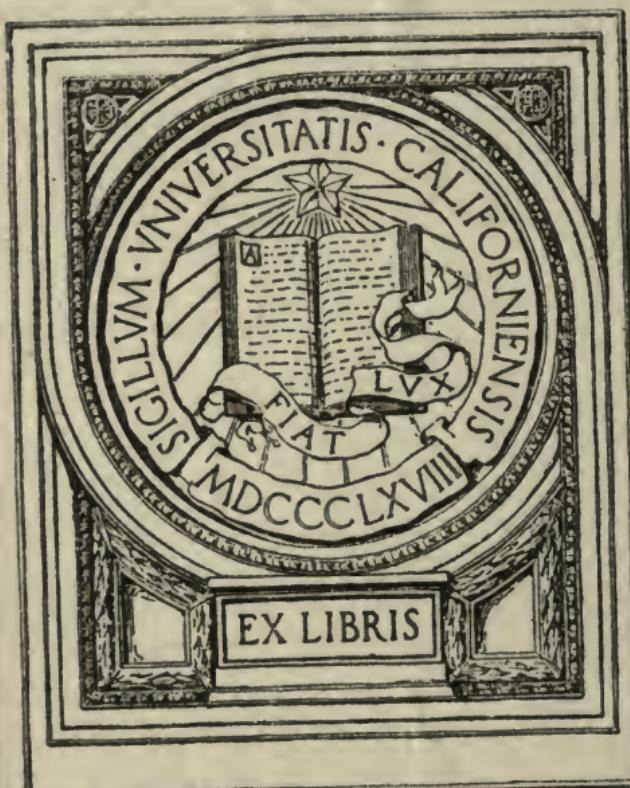
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No. 194

TILDA'S NEW HAT

BY

GEORGE PASTON

Author of "Feed the Brute," etc., etc.

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PUBLISHER
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SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
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Produced at His Majesty's Theatre, 1909.

ORIGINAL CAST.

CHARACTERS.

MRS. FISHWICK MISS AGNES THOMAS.

TILDA, her daughter (employed in a Jam Factory) . MISS FLORENCE LLOYD.

DAISY MEADOWS MISS SYDNEY FAIR-BROTHER.

WALTER EMERSON (a Bill
Printer MR. NORMAN PAGE.

SCENE.—Room in a tenement house in Clerkenwell.

TIME.—The present.

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TILDA'S NEW HAT.

SCENE.—Living room in a tenement house. The usual cheap furniture but with a certain attempt at smartness in the shape of antimacassars, mats under the lamp and under vases of artificial flowers. Christmas number pictures on the walls, and picture postcards on the chimney-piece, propped up against the mugs and photograph frames. There is a door opening on the passage, R.C., and a door, leading to the bedroom, L. A window, L.C. Fireplace, L. Under the window is a large, old-fashioned bureau or chest of drawers, on which are a looking-glass and some ornaments. There is a couch, R. A square table, which should stand in the centre of the room, has been pulled near the fireplace, leaving plenty of floor space, the chairs standing with their backs to the wall, except two armchairs, one on each side of the table. On one of the small chairs a concertina or accordion is lying.

MRS. FISHWICK sits by the table, L., working at a striped cotton shirt. She is a hard-featured woman of the grim and gloomy Puritan type, with drab hair and drab clothes.

TILDA lolls on the couch, R., showing a plentiful display of ankle. She is a dark, showy-looking girl, with black hair puffed out over her ears, and coming low on her forehead in a large fringe or three sausage curls. She wears a fawn skirt and a bright blue satin blouse, very fussily made, with a large cape collar of white

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crochet lace. Round her collarless neck is a string of big pearl beads, and her dress is fastened by a large gilt brooch. In her ears are large earrings. She wears a number of bangles on her wrists. She is engaged in pinning black ostrich feathers into a huge black velvet or satin hat.

MRS. F. (*querulously*). Why ever don't you sew them feathers in, Tilda. The pins 'll never hold.

TILDA. Ow, I haven't the patience. When I've pinned 'em, you can tack 'em in . . . I wish you'd hurry up with that blouse, ma. I want to wear it Monday.

MRS. F. (*grumblingly*). This stuff is just like a bit of ticking. Breaks all me needles. Wherever you got it, I don't know—

TILDA. Tuppence farthing at the Salvage Sale, and it'll wash and wear for ever. Three yards I got. That's six-three the blouse.

MRS. F. You don't reckon the hooks and the thread and my time.

TILDA. Ow, your time ! (*Laughs.*) That's worth a fat lot, ain't it ? . . . (*Looks at clock.*) You'll have to run out in a minute to get some bloater paste for tea.

MRS. F. Why ? What for ? Who's coming ?

TILDA. Mr. Emerson said he might look round on his way to the Institute.

MRS. F. That why you got your best blouse on ? You going to walk out with him to-morrow ?

TILDA (*snubbingly*). Maybe I shall, maybe I shan't.

MRS. F. I thought he was Daisy Meadows' chap. (*Virtuously.*) When I was a gal, I didn't take other gals' chaps away.

TILDA. Couldn't get 'em, I suppose.

MRS. F. Get a dozen if I wanted 'em. Ah, things was very different in my young day. We didn't stand a soldier drinks, and pay him a bob a kiss.

TILDA (*firing up*). And no more don't I. I hope I look higher than a Tommy.

MRS. F. (*disparagingly*). With your looks you'll have to take what you can get. Why, you ain't got no figure. When I was your age, I had a bust like a band-box.

TILDA. I like to see my own feet.

MRS. F. And you ain't got a ha'porth o' colour. My cheeks were that rosy you could see 'em half a mile away.

TILDA. I should have floured 'em.

MRS. F. Yes, you *would*, and that's why your skin's so coarse. My skin was like satin. Ah, dear ! I only had to pick and choose.

TILDA. It's a wonder you didn't pick some one better than father.

MRS. F. Father was all right when I married him.

TILDA (*pertly*). Then was it *you* drove him to the drink ?

MRS. F. (*rising*). I'll drive you somewhere if you give me any more sauce. (*Looking at hat.*) I wouldn't have been seen with a thing like that on me head. A nice chip bonnet, trimmed with ribbon and tied under me chin, me hair neatly parted, and gathered in a chenille net behind—

TILDA (*contemptuously*). Oh, I dare say. You were in service ; you had to say " Yes' m—no 'm." (*Mimicking.*) Catch me demeaning meself ! Give me me independence—

MRS. F. If you like to call it independence, and the boss always after you with the fine-book.

Bell rings.

TILDA. Just run down and see whether that's Mr. Emerson—or the milk.

MRS. F. More like one of them Mulligan kids ringing the bell for a lark. I'll wring his neck if I can catch him.

MRS. FISHWICK exits, R.C. TILDA hums a tune, and tries on her hat before the glass. MRS. FISHWICK returns, followed by WALTER EMERSON. He is a tall, pale, dark young man with an austere, earnest expression, and is dressed in a semi-artistic, semi-socialist style. He wears a loose, dark tweed coat, a bright red tie, a rather low collar, and a Trilby hat, which he takes off as he comes into the room. He speaks carefully, and rather mincingly, carefully pronouncing most of his h's. The cockney accent, of the genteeler sort, is still quite perceptible. His manner is serious and soulful, and he gazes yearnfully at TILDA. When seated, he twists his legs into knots, and pulls his fingers, as though he were trying to crack the joints.

MRS. F. It 'taint the milk. It's only Mr. Emerson.
(Sits, R.)

EMERSON. Good-afternoon, Miss Fishwick. I hope you are very well. I'm sorry Mrs. Fishwick should have had the trouble—

TILDA. Oh, that's all right. (To MRS. FISHWICK.) Best put your bonnet on and fetch the paste now.

EMERSON (perfunctorily). But cawn't I—

TILDA. No, no, sit down, Mr. Emerson. It does ma good to get a bit of a run.

MRS. F. So you think. (Gets up and puts on old cricket cap.) Wait till you've got various veins in both your legs.

Exit MRS. FISHWICK, L.

EMERSON (sitting, R. Tilda sits on table, L.). I took the liberty of bringing you this little volume round, Miss Fishwick. *Five Minutes with the Finest Authors.* There are some beautiful pieces in it. (Gets up and gives her book. Sits down on chair, R., of table.)

TILDA (carelessly). Oh, thanks. I like a nice tale myself.

EMERSON (*earnestly*). But don't you think, Miss Fishwick, we ought to read something *instructive*, if it's only for five minutes in the day?

TILDA. Can't say it's a long-felt want—

EMERSON. Now I'm going to try and persuade you to join our Mutual Improvement Debating Society. Ladies are admitted as honorary members. Of course, we don't expect 'em to speak.

TILDA. Oh, don't you? I should speak fast enough if I wanted to.

EMERSON (*taking out a paper*). I brought the silli-bus of our winter session—

TILDA. Silly bus! There is plenty of them about. (*Laughs.*)

EMERSON (*with a pained smile*). I don't think you quite understand. This is a kind of prospectus, gives the list of lectures, with discussion to follow. Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Rusking—

TILDA (*obviously bored*). I've seen Tennyson with O'Gorman at the Met.

EMERSON. *Lord* Tennyson, the powet.

TILDA. Oh, I'm not taking any! I don't want to improve nobody, nor I don't want to be improved myself.

EMERSON (*rising*). Well, now. I think there's nothing like a little *culture*. I've dipped into nearly every volume in the Hundred Best Books, and read some of 'em right through.

TILDA. Chase me!

EMERSON. But I know there's several more books I ought to read before I can call myself a *reely* cultured man. (*With enthusiasm.*) Oh, Miss Fishwick, I should so like to form your mind.

TILDA. Form me mind! What's the matter with me mind? Lectures, indeed! I got lectures enough when I was a kid.

EMERSON (*with a tolerant smile*). Oh, well, p'raps the dramatic society is more in *your* line. I'll send

you tickets for our next show. Part one—Scenes from Hamlet. They've let *me* in for Hamlet.

TILDA. You print the programmes for nothing, don't you? Let's see, it was Rowmeo last time I went. (*Sweetly.*) You was Rowmeo.

EMERSON *smirks.*

Oh lor, how I did yawn!

EMERSON. Yawn?

TILDA. I think Shakespear's overrated. Give me 'All Caine.

EMERSON (*distressed*). Oh, Miss Fishwick!

TILDA. Ain't you going to do anything more lively? A coon song, or a cake walk?

EMERSON. Part two—Recitations by Members of the Society. They've let me in for two.

TILDA. Two!

EMERSON. The Forsaken Veteran and the Little Stowaway. I happen to have the book in my pocket. P'raps you wouldn't mind hearing me me words.

TILDA. Righto. But you've got to play milliner's dummy for me first. I can't get these feathers to me mind.

Puts hat on his head, and surveys him thoughtfully. He maintains a dignified attitude.

Yes, them front feathers might be a bit higher. Ah, that's a lot more stylish. Haw, haw, you look got up for 'Amlet now.

EMERSON. Don't make me ridiculous.

TILDA (*pricks her finger*). Oh, damn the pin!

EMERSON (*starts*). I beg your pard'n.

TILDA. Oh, it just slipped out. 'Taint s' often I use language before a gentleman. (*Takes hat off.*)

EMERSON (*with solemn admiration*). That's a handsome hat—good taste, too.

TILDA (*complacently*). Yes, whatever I has, I must have *good*. Nothing cheap and nasty for *me*.

EMERSON (*holds out his book, and points to the place*). If you don't mind. Top of the page.

TILDA. Oh, all right. Chuck it off your chest, TILDA sits on table, while EMERSON stands, centre.

EMERSON. The Forsaken Veteran.

He strikes an appropriate attitude and bursts into recitation with theatrical expression and exaggerated gesticulation. He should try to "act" the piece with all the vices of the cheap elocutionist.

" Old and feeble, scarred and maimed, a poor old man
who has fought and bled
In the greatest victories of English arms—I found
unsheltered and unfed.
The faded ribbons upon his breast, the emblems of
honour and valiant deed,
Are all the comforts that cheer him now, in his 'oary
age—hoary age and his hour of need.
He does not speak with a bitter thought of his treat-
ment now at his country's hand ;
He makes no complaint—complaint— (Dries up.)

TILDA (*who has been fidgeting with hat*). Complaint
—complaint. (*Hastily looks for place in book, and rattles off.*)

" For his heart is loyal to his Emperor King and his
native land."

EMERSON (*starting line afresh*).

" He makes no complaint, for his heart is loyal to his
Emperor King and his native land.

He simply points to his shabby coat, the spot where
the ribbons adorn his breast,

' That's all I am worth,' he will only say,
That's all he is worth ; we can guess the rest." . . .

TILDA *yawns loudly and openly*.

EMERSON (*stopping short*). I'm afraid I'm boring
you, Miss Fishwick.

TILDA (*comfortably continuing her yawn*). Ow, no but p'raps you'd better keep the rest till the night That'll leave me something to look forward to.

Organ strikes up outside.

TILDA (*excitedly, rushing to the window, and speaking through the last two lines*). Ow, there's an orgin! (*Looking out.*) He's got a monkey. What's that they're playing? Oh, it's "The Twi—Twilight"—that's a good song. Ever hear Lashwood sing it? Goes something like this. (*Begins first humming and then singing in provocative style.*)

"In the twi-twi-twilight,
Out in the beautiful twilight—
They all go out for a walk, walk, walk,
A quiet old spoon and a talk, talk, talk.
That's the time they long for,
Just before the night,
And many a grand little wedding is planned
In the twi-twi-light."

(*Dances, with high kicks, etc.*)

The music suddenly gets more rapid.

TILDA. Oh, lor, now we're off!

Whirls round quicker and quicker. EMERSON has stood leaning forward, and gazing at her with devouring eyes. As the music suddenly breaks off, TILDA stops whirling, giddy and breathless, and sways towards EMERSON. He makes a sudden spring forward, catches her in his arms, and kisses her. TILDA yields for an instant, then gives him a ringing slap on the face, breaking away as she does so.

TILDA (*breathlessly*). Call yourself a gentleman, Is that the way to treat a lady?

EMERSON (*sobered*). I'm sorry—I forgöt meself—just for the moment. I apologize. You'll overlook it, Miss Fishwick?

TILDA (*with a show of resentment*): Don't make too sure of that.

EMERSON. Don't be hard-hearted, Miss Fishwick. If you *will* look so fetching, how can a poor feller behave himself? (*Insinuatingly.*) You ought always to wear blue, you know. Blue's your colour. (*Touches her sleeve.*)

TILDA. D'ye' want a cut lip as well as a thick ear? (*Goes down, L.*)

EMERSON. Do you know what I came for to-day?

TILDA. Came to make a nuisance of yourself.

EMERSON. Came to ask if you'd walk out with me to-morrow? It 'ud be lovely in Alexandra Park,

TILDA. Thought you walked out with Miss Meadows.

EMERSON. I suppose a gentleman needn't always walk out with the *same* young lady.

TILDA (*with decision*). He would if he was mine.

EMERSON. Yours would never want a change. Will you—Tilda. (*Tries to take her hand.*) You know I'd do anything in the world for *you*.

TILDA. Would yer? Then p'raps you'll just run round to the cobbler, and fetch my shoes home. (*Crosses, L.*) It's the little man at the corner of East Street—you know.

EMERSON. Of course—delighted. (*Following her.*) But first—won't you give me—

TILDA. Oh, the money—I shall forget my own head next; there'll be tenpence to pay—here's a shilling. (*Takes it off mantelpiece.*)

EMERSON (*reproachfully*). You know I didn't mean— (*Takes her outstretched hand with the money, and draws her towards him. She hangs back coyly.*) Little floweret!

TILDA (*wriggling*). Oh, go on! Get away closer.

EMERSON (*bending towards her*). Just one.

MRS. FISHWICK'S voice is heard outside in altercation.

MRS. F. Better go 'ome and sleep if off, dear.

TILDA (*quickly, pushing Emerson away before he can kiss her*). There's ma back again.

EMERSON (*turning away*). Oh, dem !

Enter MRS. FISHWICK.

MRS. F. (*speaking into passage*). I may be no lady, but I don't go to bed with me boots on. (*Shuts door.*)

TILDA. Ma, Mr. Emerson's going to run to the cobbler's for my shoes. That'll save you going out again, won't it ?

MRS. F. (*sitting down, R.*). You wouldn't get me down them stairs again in a hurry. I wish you could feel my legs.

EMERSON (*at door*). *Au revoir*, as we say in France.

TILDA. So long.

Exit EMERSON.

MRS. F. (*inquisitively*). What you sent him out for ? You know your shoes won't ready afore Monday.

TILDA (L.). Things was getting *warm*—and I wanted a bit of time to think. I don't hardly know me own mind.

MRS. F. If he says "snip" you'd better say "snap." You ain't everybody's money.

TILDA. Glad to be rid of me, wouldn't you ?

MRS. F. Yes, and sorry for the man that gets you.

TILDA *takes up striped cotton shirt and examines it critically.*

TILDA. These sleeves ain't set in the same. And there's no draw-tape. And you ain't boned the collar-band. And I told you I wanted white hooks, and you've been and put black ones.

MRS. F. Better make the next yourself. Wonder how long that'll hold together.

Knock at door.

TILDA. Whoever's that? Come in.

Enter DAISY MEADOWS. *She should be a nice, gentle-looking little girl with hair brushed off her forehead. She is very plainly but tidily dressed in a dark skirt, with a cotton or flannelette shirt. She should wear a flat hat, simply trimmed with ribbon, and perhaps a motor scarf twisted round her neck. She is the sort of girl who looks innocent, yielding and childlike, but has an obstinate will where her own desires are concerned, and generally contrives to get her own way. At this moment she looks pale and agitated, as though she had something on her mind.*

DAISY (*speaking with a nervous tremor in her voice, yet with a certain quiet determination*). Oh, good afternoon.

MRS. F. Oh, it's Miss Meadows. Good-afternoon.

DAISY (*in same tone*). I wanted to see you, Tilda.

TILDA (*with assumed carelessness*). Well, here I am, as large as life. Sit down, won't you?

DAISY (*looking at MRS. FISHWICK*). No, I mustn't stop. I'd—I'd got something to say to you, Tilda, but it'll do another time. Or p'raps you could come out for a stroll.

TILDA (*looking at MRS. FISHWICK, who settles herself more comfortably in her chair*). Ma—you know you've got to wash out them tan stockings of mine for to-morrow. Why ever don't you go and rub 'em out now. There's plenty of boiling water, and you'll have nice time before tea.

MRS. F. (*with a feeble attempt at rebellion*). But you've got a clean pair in the drawer. There's only a little hole where you always kick your stockings out. I could soon darn that over—

TILDA (*picking up kettle*). I told you I wanted the pair with the clocks for to-morrow. Here, take the kettle. (*Hands it to MRS. FISHWICK*.)

MRS. FISHWICK *takes kettle, and slowly rises.*

TILDA. Get a move on.

MRS. F. (*crossing to door L., with sarcasm.*) Any more little jobs you've got for me?

TILDA (*coolly*). Not just now. Mebbe I shall think of some after tea.

MRS. F. (*going out L., grumbling*). I wonder who you'll get to wash and mend for you when I'm gone. Don't suppose I shall be here much longer. Perhaps I shall have an easier time when I'm an angel. (*Exit.*)

TILDA (*turning to DAISY with a defiant air*). Well, what is it?

DAISY *comes down, and stands R.C., facing TILDA, who sits on table swinging her legs.* DAISY is evidently strung up, and speaks in a quiet, tense voice, with a tremor suggestive of the feeling she is holding in. As the scene proceeds, her hold on herself gradually relaxes, and she grows more agitated till the tears come. TILDA preserves an air of impudent coolness.

DAISY. Mr. Emerson's been here.

TILDA. He has.

DAISY. He tea'd with you last Saturday.

TILDA. He did.

DAISY. And he saw you home from the Social Monday night.

TILDA. That's so.

DAISY. You're going to walk out with him to-morrow.

TILDA. I am.

DAISY (*bitterly*). I wonder you ain't ashamed.

TILDA (*turning on her*). Well, I ain't.

DAISY (*with increasing agitation*). We've been walking out for months. Everybody knew he was my chap—

TILDA *gives an aggravating little laugh.*

But of course, if a girl throws herself at a young feller's head—

TILDA. Oh, shocking ! I shouldn't have thought it of you, Daisy.

DAISY (*beginning to melt, and subsiding into chair, R.*). And we wasn't only walking out. We'd settled to get married as soon as he'd got his rise. (*Sniff.*) We'd begun to get the home together. I'd bought a pair of cut glass dishes. (*On last word her voice rises to a sob.*)

TILDA (*who has been whistling and swinging her legs, suddenly stops, as though impressed in spite of herself.*). Oh—I didn't know that. I did not know you'd begun to get the home together.

DAISY. I'd begun to make my underthings. And now they'll be wasted. I couldn't wear 'em for common. (*Sob.*)

TILDA (*getting off table, and crossing to her.*). Oh, for Gawd's sake, don't keep snivelling. Mr. Emerson ain't the only kipper on the barrer. There's plenty of fellers about.

DAISY. But not like Walter. He's so intel-intellectual. They think all the world of him at the Institute ; and he said—he said he was going to form my mind. (*Sob.*)

TILDA (*sotto voce*). You've got to get one first.

DAISY. And so gentlemanly ! Always takes the outside of the pavement when walking—always lifts his hat at parting and keeps his nails so beautiful—

TILDA (*slowly, and with lingering regret*). Yes, no one can't say Mr. Emerson ain't quite the gentleman.

DAISY. Used to call me his little floweret—

TILDA turns her head sharply.

Ain't been near me for a fortnight now. (*Chokes. Then with change of tone.*) Of course, I know you're more stylish than what I am. Mother's kept me that strick. I dare say (*with a curious glance*)—if I had a hat like that—

TILDA. Hoh, you think Mr. Emerson comes after me hat and feathers, do you?

DAISY. Yes, and your dressy blowse, and your padded hair.

TILDA. It *ain't* padded. . . . Well, why don't you get yourself up more stylish? Look at that hat now! You can't expect a superior young feller like Mr. Emerson to walk out with a hat like that.

DAISY (*plaintively*). I *ain't* got no long black feathers.

TILDA. Why ever don't you belong to a feather club, same as me and other girls?

DAISY. Mother don't think it's nice.

TILDA. Nice be blowed! You earn your own money, don't you? You should have brought your ma up same as I've brought mine. . . . Give me something with a bit of a dash about it. This hat now—
(*Putting it on.*)

DAISY. Ow, it is *beautiful*! I should *love* to wear a hat like that.

TILDA. Would yer? Try it on. Here, take the pin out.

DAISY removes her hat, and TILDA put the big hat on DAISY's head.

Lor, don't it look a sight on your little flat head? Why ever don't you fluff your hair out a bit?

DAISY. Mother don't think it's genteel.

TILDA. Genteel be blowed! Come on. Sit right here. Hold still a minute. (*Takes hairpins out of DAISY's hair, and brings forward front part.*) My! it's as soft as silk, but it don't make no show. Pads is what you want. I've got a pompadour somewhere.

DAISY. A pompey what?

TILDA (*opens drawer, and takes out hair frame and comb. Pins frame on DAISY's head, and rolls her hair over it, talking all the time*). Now, my hair—I just roll it round me fingers, pop the combs in, and it sticks out like wires.

DAISY *squeaks.*

Now then—did I pull you? All done by kindness. Will you have it one curl, or two? This is going to be a little bit of all right.

DAISY. Don't make me look fast, dear.

TILDA (*standing back*). There, that's something like—though I say it. Run and look at yourself. . . . I'll show you something. (*Quickly takes out her own combs or pins, talking all the time, and flattens her front hair back, leaving her forehead bare.*) This is how you walk out with a chap. Fit to scare the motor-busses. Ever see a suffragette after a kick-up with a policeman? The latest fashions for 'Olloway, the new winter health resort. Votes for women!

DAISY. Oh, you are a cure.

By this time TILDA should have finished business with hair.

Look at me now. There's an objeck-lesson for you.

DAISY (*giggling*). Oh, Tilda, you do look a guy.

TILDA (*putting the big hat on DAISY again*). Now the *blowse* is all wrong. Wherever did you get that measly little blowse?

DAISY. Mother chose it.

TILDA (*sniffs*). So I should have guessed. What you think of mine?

DAISY (*with enthusiasm*). It's perfectly *sweet*. Real dressy, and yet so chaste. I should *love* to wear a blowse like that.

TILDA. Would yer? You can try it on if you like. Here, help me off with this. Hurry up.

DAISY quickly unhooks TILDA's blouse. TILDA takes it off, disclosing a pink woven petticoat-body. She helps DAISY into it, talking all the time.

It's too big for you, but it'll go on over your own. Lor' ain't you slight? Wherever do you put your

dinner? Hold still: Blessed if you don't wriggle like a flea on a hot plate. Blow these hooks—whatever ma gets 'em!—and these eyes have got the squint. There—that's the last. Now run and look at yourself in the glass.

DAISY (*running across to glass on wall, L., and surveying herself*). Ow, I do look nice!

TILDA (*putting on striped cotton shirt her mother has been working at*). Bit of style about you now. That's a dressy blouse, I will say. (*Looking at DAISY's hat*.) This hat of yours ain't such a bad shape. I could trim it up so's you wouldn't know it.

DAISY (*eagerly*). Could you?

TILDA (*hesitates, looking from one hat to the other*). I—er—let's see now—p'raps— (*With a sudden outburst of generosity*.) Tell yer what it is, if you'll leave that old thing behind, I'll lend you my hat to take you over Sunday.

DAISY (*with rapture, yet hardly able to believe in her own good fortune*). Oh, Tilda, you wouldn't really! You can't mean it? Reely? (*Crestfallen*.) But I ain't got a blowse fit to go with it.

TILDA. (*impatiently*). Then set to work and make one, or get your ma to do it.

DAISY (*sadly*). I ain't got a pattern.

TILDA. You don't seem to have got much. Never saw such a little bit of gawd'-elp-us. I— (*Hesitates, eyeing the smart blouse, and looking down at her own shirt*.) I—um—I'll—no, I wo— (*With another splendid outburst of generosity*.) Tell yer what it is—I'll lend you that blowse to take the pattern off of.

DAISY (*with agonized longing*). Oh, Tilda, but I reely couldn't—

TILDA (*mimicking her*). Ow, Daisy, but you reely could. . . . It's all right. I can wear my pink velveteen, and my second-best hat with the parrakeet trimming. It's better than most girls' best.

DAISY. Oh, you are an old *dee-ar*! (*Kisses her*.)

With sudden recollection.) But whatever shall I say to mother?

TILDA. Tell her to go and put her head in a bag—the old blighter. (*Takes concertina from hook on wall.*) Didn't you say you'd been practising for the Choral. What you going to sing?

DAISY. "It's only a Beautiful Picture—in a beautiful Golden Frame."

TILDA. Tune the old cow died of. (*Makes noises with the concertina.*) Let's have a verse.

Knock, and enter EMERSON quickly.

EMERSON. The man says your shoes won't be ready till—oh—*(Stops short in dismay.)* Oh, beg pardon—I didn't see—*(Jaw drops at finding himself between the two girls, and he looks as though he meant to bolt.)*

TILDA *(easily).* Miss Meadows has just called round to have a practice for the Choral.

EMERSON *(in great confusion and discomfort).* Daisy—Miss Meadows—for the moment I didn't hardly—*(Looking from one to the other.)* Why—you—you've been and changed—

TILDA *(readily and fluently, going up to back).* I'm going to trim up Daisy's hat, and I've lent her mine to take her over Sunday. It's my first commission in the millinery line. I shall be setting up in Bond Street next, and cutting out the Countesses. (*Takes length of pink ribbon out of drawer, and comes down to EMERSON, who has been standing, R., with his eyes glued on DAISY, who sits L., looking self-conscious and happy. TILDA takes him by the shoulders, and pushes him down.*) Sit down, Mr. Emerson, I want my dummy again.

Puts DAISY's hat on his head, and twists ribbon round it, tying it into big loose bow in front.

There, with a couple of yards of this ribbon—three—three at the Salvage Sale—and a paradise mount—and

a bunch of cherries—and a cut steel buckle, yon wouldn't know this hat again. (*Backs a little to see the effect of her handiwork, and laughs.*) What price Rowmeo now !

EMERSON (*with dignity*). Have you quite done, Miss Fishwick ?

TILDA (*removing the hat*). Yes, thanks. Mr. Emerson, you make a first-class dummy.

EMERSON (*looking with undisguised admiration at Daisy*). I should hardly have known you, Daisy. You ought always to dress like that. Blue's your colour.

DAISY bridles.

TILDA (*draws a wail out of concertina*). You going to the Choral, Mr. Emerson ? Daisy is going to sing "It's only a beautiful picture—in a beautiful golden frame." Come on, Daisy, let's have a verse.

DAISY (*clearing her throat*). Ow, I couldn't, I've got such a shocking cold.

EMERSON (*encouragingly*). Yes, give us a verse, Daisy—that's my favourite song.

TILDA (*boisterously*). Oh, go on ! Don't be bashful. Goes something like this, don't it ? (*Makes a weird flourish with concertina.*)

DAISY (*gently*). I think I could do it best alone, Tilda.

TILDA. Oh, all right—all right.

Stands centre, behind the other two, gently waving concertina in time to the song. EMERSON sits, with his eyes on DAISY. During the last lines he should mark time with his head or hat, as though moved. DAISY sits demurely on her chair, with her feet crossed, and her hands clasped, and sings in a careful childlike manner, with a little thread of a voice.

DAISY (*sings*)—

“ If those lips could only speak,
 If those eyes could only see,
 If those beautiful gowlden tresses
 Were there in realitee.
 If I could but take your hand,
 As I did when you took my name—

(*With sentiment.*)

But it's only a beautiful Pic-ture
 In a bewtiful—gowlden Frame.”

As she stops, there is a faint sigh of pleasurable emotion from the other two.

TILDA (*throwing off the touch of sentiment into which she has been betrayed*). That's something like, ain't it? Knocks spots out of Shakespeare and the improving lecture.

DAISY. Oh, I think Shakespeare's sweet. (*With a glance at Emerson.*) And I do love the lectures.

EMERSON (*jumping up, and crossing to her*). I've got the new syllabus here. I'll show you; Tennyson—Browning—

DAISY. Tennyson's my favourite. I can say the Queen o' the May right through.

TILDA. You'll stop to tea, both of you. We've got some bloater paste, and ma'll make us all some buttered toast.

DAISY. No, I must be getting home. I told mother I was only running out to the post.

EMERSON (*eagerly*). I'll see you home.

DAISY (*stifflly*). Oh, pray don't trouble, Mr. Emerson. I'm used to walking alone.

EMERSON. It's hardly a step out of my way.

TILDA (*to Daisy*). You'd best sew them feathers in, Daisy. They're a bit wobbly, and whatever you do, don't let 'em get a spot of rain.

DAISY (*solemnly*). I'd be drowned myself sooner. Good-bye, old dear. (*Kissing TILDA enthusiastically*,

first on one cheek, then on the other.) I do think it's so sweet of you. (Kissing.)

TILDA (*impatiently*). Oh, all right—that'll do. (*Pushing her aside.*) Good-bye, Daisy, good-bye, Mr. Emerson. (*Going up.*) I don't think I'll join your Mutual Improvement Society, thank you all the same. I'm afraid of being improved right away.

EMERSON (*coldly*). Good-evening, Miss Fishwick, I think it's a pity when young ladies have no desire for culture. Now Daisy is beginning to form a very correct taste. She can always perceive the clever bits I point out to her, can't you, Daisy?

DAISY (*looking up at him*). Yes, Walter. Good-bye, Tilda. (*This should be spoken sweetly over her shoulder.*)

EMERSON *holds open the door for DAISY, who peacock*
out, followed by EMERSON. TILDA stands still for a
moment. Then dashes down concertina, and calls.

TILDA. Ma, you can come out now.

Enter MRS. FISHWICK.

MRS. F. (*grumbling*). Time I did. (*Catches sight of TILDA and starts.*) Lord a'mighty, whatever you been and done to yourself?

TILDA (*shortly*). Trying a new style of hair-dressing.

MRS. F. (*hanging tan stockings from chimney-piece, and beginning to busy herself with the tea-things*). Better not try that too often, or you might crack the glass. You couldn't help being born homely, but you needn't go and turn yourself into a reg'lar Aunt Sally.

TILDA (*looking out of window*). There they go! Don't they look a pair of sillies? Never noticed his legs wasn't straight before. (*Sniff.*) And ain't his shoulders round? (*Sniff.*) Don't my hat look lovely? (*Sniff.*)

MRS. F. (*by table, cutting bread*). What you keep sniffing for? I told you you'd catch cold if you left off them warm knickers.

TILDA. (*Coming down to fireplace*) Is that old kettle boiling? (*Takes up kettle. Then gives a yell, and drops it with a clatter*.) Ow! (*Begins to cry*.)

MRS. F. (*starting*). Sakes alive! What you done now?

TILDA. B-burnt me hand with the beastly old kettle.

Rushes across to MRS. FISHWICK, flops down on the floor, and hides her face in her mother's lap.

MRS. F. (*unexpectedly displaying real maternal tenderness and sympathy*). There, there, it ain't so bad as all that. Let mother see. Why, it ain't even a bit red.

Sob from TILDA.

Don't you cry now, my pretty. There's plenty more better than him. You'd get a dozen any day if you held up your finger. The smartest, handsomest girl in Chapel Street, though I say it. There ain't another to hold a candle to you. There—there—

TILDA (*suddenly springing up, and dashing away the tears*). I ain't 'owling for him, so don't you think it. He's a lot too cultured for me. If ever he tries to improve my mind again, I'll improve his face so as his own mother won't know it. With his 'Amlets and his Rowmeos!

MRS. F. (*soothingly, taking up teapot to fill it from the kettle*). No, you don't want no Rowmeos; what you want is a cup of mother's tea. (*Begins to hum in cracked voice as she fills teapot*.)

“In the twi-twi-light,
Out in the beautiful twi-light.”

TILDA pricks up her ears at the tune. She is standing up centre. As she looks across at her mother, the hurt, angry look dies away, and her own broad jolly smile begins to dawn.

“They all go out for a walk, walk, walk,
A quiet old spoon, and a talk, talk, talk,

TILDA (*begins to laugh, and joins in the song*).

That's the time they long for,
Just before the night,
And many a grand little wedding is planned
In the twi-twi-light.”

Dance, while MRS. FISHWICK waves the teapot in one hand, and the lid in the other, and looks on admiringly.

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Second CURTAIN rises on TILDA still dancing, and MRS. FISHWICK waving the teapot.

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